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SPACE
AND
PLACE
IN CHINESE
RELIGIOUS
TRADITIONS

L'amour, c'est une occupation de l'espace. [HENRI MICHAUX, *Passages*]

La compassion est la totale ouverture dans laquelle le Buddha n'avait ni terrain ni territoire. . . . Il enseignait un dharma dépourvu de passion, dénué d'agression. Alors que la passion se saisit d'un territoire et s'y cramponne. [CHOGYAM TRUNGPA, *Le mythe de la liberté*]

I want to present here a few materials and reflections concerning the interaction of Buddhism and popular religion in China and Japan. I will start with Robert Redfield's terminology of "great" versus "little" tradition. I am not interested, however, in contrasting rural and urban areas, as Redfield did. I want to examine how two types of discourse interact, how they invest a specific geographical and mental space, and what they have to say, precisely, about space. However, unlike Buddhism or any other "great tradition," popular religion does not provide an elaborate theoretical discourse: it is only in a round-about way, through legends and hagiography, that its elusive voice may be heard. I believe that stories setting up a dialogue between a Buddhist monk and a local god, often in the form of a snake, represent the confrontation of two irreconcilable (and yet coexisting)

worldviews: the unlocalized conceptions of Buddhism as universal doctrine and the localized beliefs of popular religion as ritual practice; or, to use Jonathan Smith's terminology in a slightly modified fashion, the "utopian" and "locative" visions of the world.¹ I will argue that this always localized tension between localizing and unlocalizing tendencies is prior to any polarization into "great" and "little" traditions or whatever other paradigm we may use and is essential to the vitality of a "great" tradition such as Buddhism.

OF SNAKES AND MONKS

I will begin with an example borrowed from the Shugendō tradition, still alive today in Japan among a type of mountain ascetics known as *yamabushi*. During a recent stay in Japan, as I was visiting various cultic centers of the Ise peninsula, I came on a once thriving Shugendō temple, the Hōkakuji, or Temple of the Phoenix Pavilion, now in a state of disrepair. The person in charge offered to show me the treasures of the temple—including, among other things, a strange relic that, according to her, was the skull of a huge snake who once lived with his female on this mountain and who devoured travelers. According to the local legend, the Buddhist saint Shōbō (alias Rigen daishi, 832–909), a Shingon priest considered one of the founders of Shugendō, having heard about these snakes, resolved to convert them to the Buddhist dharma. He succeeded in converting the female but not the male, which he finally had to kill. He subsequently founded the temple and enshrined there the skull I was now examining. It was certainly an impressive object, although in the relative darkness of the altar and owing to my limited osteological knowledge I could not even be certain that it was a real skull. One thing seemed relatively certain: snakes of this size did not exist in medieval Japan. But my informant seemed firmly convinced of the contrary, and it would have been impolite to point out to her that her story had variants all over Asia.²

¹ In a collection of essays whose title, *Map Is Not Territory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), would have fit the present paper equally well, Jonathan Z. Smith defines the *locative* vision as one that emphasizes place and the *utopian* vision as one that stresses the value of being in no place (p. 101). However, he further defines the former as a normative, imperial worldview, whereas the latter, he says, reflects a peripheral, disruptive tendency (pp. 293, 309). I believe that, in the cases of Ch'an Buddhism and of Chinese popular religion considered below, the roles were soon inverted, "utopian" Ch'an representing the normative vision and "locative" popular religion (or whatever we may call it) the disruptive tendency. For Redfield's terminology, see Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 41.

² A further example will illustrate the persistence of snake-related beliefs in Japan. The above-mentioned Hōkakuji is located a relatively short distance from Mount

Since the time of the Buddha, monks have been known to convert snakes, or Nāgas, to the Buddhist dharma and/or to receive protection from them. In most cases, these snakes are the form assumed by a local deity who, once converted, decides to protect Buddhism. The best example is, of course, the Nāga Mucilinda, who protected the newly awakened Buddha from a storm by providing him shelter under his sevenfold hood. The legitimizing role of the converted Nāga as guardian of a particular territory has been well documented in the case of Indian Buddhism.³ In China, dragons and tigers came to perform the same function. And in many legends, the daughter of T'u-ti kung, the god of the place, is described as a snake.

CH'AN AND LOCAL SPIRITS

I want now to focus on a few cases borrowed from the Ch'an tradition in China and, more precisely, from the so-called Northern school. This school was the mainstream of Chinese Buddhism toward

Yoshino, a major cultic center for Shugendō. In the past, the valley on the southern slope of Mount Yoshino was known as the "Valley of Hell" and was a place feared by villagers. Some time after the Second World War, Kakuchō, the abbot of a temple dedicated to the Shugendō deity Zaō gongen, was practicing there when he found a dead snake whose head had been crushed by someone. He put the remains of the snake in a hole by the stream and recited a prayer. The next day, he found to his surprise that the snake had disappeared; then suddenly he saw it swimming in the stream. After that, nobody ever saw it again. From this moment on, Kakuchō began to receive revelations in his dreams. One night he heard a loud voice saying, "Worship me! I am the snake you found, actually a manifestation of Zaō gongen. You must worship me as Nōten daijin. If you do so, I will save all those who suffer from the head." Kakuchō did as ordered and built near the stream a stone memorial that came to be worshiped as the abode of Nōten daijin. In this way a new deity appeared in the world. Kakuchō received from Nōten daijin a mantra that is said to transcend the division between Shintō and Buddhism. Another mantra recited to obtain Nōten daijin's protection is the mantra of Benzaiten, a Buddhist avatar of the Indian goddess of art and music, Saravastī, who according to tradition appears under the form of a snake. Nōten specializes in curing all illnesses of the head. He also answers all kinds of prayer, such as demands for success in university entrance examinations, and has thus become widely worshiped year round by pilgrims from all over Japan. According to this new "cult" sponsored by the established tradition of Shugendō, he is a living god who came to save this polluted world. The cult of Benzaiten, however, has spread independently outside of Shugendō, and altars to this snake deity can be found in many Zen monasteries. On the relationships between snake and mountain god in Japan, see Higo Kazuo, *Kodai denshō kenkyū* (Studies in ancient traditions), 2d ed. (Tokyo, 1943); see also Cornelius Ouwehand, "Some Notes on the God Susa-no-o," *Monumenta Nipponica* 14, nos. 3-4 (October 1958): 138-61; M. W. de Visser, "The Snake in Japanese Superstition," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalischen Sprachen an der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin* 14, no. 1 (1911): 267-322; and W. Michael Kelsey, "Salvation of the Snake, the Snake of Salvation: Buddhist-Shintō Conflict and Resolution," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 8, nos. 1-2 (March-June 1981): 83-113.

³ See, e.g., Lowell W. Bloss, "The Buddha and the Nāga: A Study in Buddhist Folk Religiosity," *History of Religions* 13, no. 1 (August 1973): 36-53; and Andrew

the beginning of the eighth century before being superseded by the Southern school.⁴ The latter remained the only representative of Ch'an orthodoxy and is still known today through its Japanese avatar, the Zen sect. But the first significant contacts between Ch'an and popular religion (and Taoism) occurred during the heyday of the Northern school, which had developed in a place that had been until then a stronghold of Taoism, a mountain known as Sung-shan.

Sung-shan was—and still is—the “Central Peak,” one of the five sacred mountains of China. In the Taoist tradition, these five mountains were sometimes considered as the five fingers of the cosmic Lao Tzu. (Another interpretation defines Sung-shan as Lao Tzu's belly.) All of the mountains were interconnected by an array of caves and were the gateways to the Taoist underworld (or Heavens).⁵ Taoist mythology was spatialized, mapping both the outer space and the inner space of the body (where countless and colorful gods dwelt). The mountain was thus a text to be deciphered, a succession of spaces that themselves encapsulated mythological time. Its toponymy reveals a wealth of mythical associations: Cave of the Precious Jade Girl, Red Cooking Basin, Jade Mirror Peak, White Crane Peak, Three Storks Peak, Jade Man Peak, and so on. The mountain was saturated with mythical references and overpopulated with spirits, although it appeared deserted to Christian missionary eyes. A Western visitor in the early twentieth century described it thus: “Verily the place is all but empty, though by no means swept and garnished. As the old faiths give way, what is to come? Devils worse than before, or the good news of a Heavenly Father?”⁶

Rawlinson, “Nāgas and the Magical Cosmology of Buddhism,” *Religion* 16 (1986): 135–53.

⁴ For more details concerning this school, see John R. McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986).

⁵ According to a Taoist work entitled *Chart of the True Form of the Five Peaks*, “The Central Peak or Sung-shan . . . is the place where the True Man . . . obtained the Tao. The Mountain god's family name is Yun, his personal name Yang. . . . The Central Peak presides in the world over mountains and rivers, gorges and valleys, and simultaneously over oxes, sheep and all rice-eating beings. Such are the things in his jurisdiction” (quoted in Edouard Chavannes, *Le T'ai Chan: Essai de monographie d'un culte chinois* [Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1910], p. 418). See also Michel Soymié, “Le Lo-feou chan: Etude de géographie religieuse,” *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 48, no. 1 (1956): 1–139; and Edouard Chavannes, “Le Jet des dragons,” in *Mémoires concernant l'Asie Orientale* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1919), 3:53–220.

⁶ William E. Geil, *The Sacred 5 of China* (London, 1926), p. 181. See also Joseph Hers, “The Sacred Mountains of China: Sung-shan the Deserted,” *China Journal* 24, no. 2 (February 1936): 78–82; Alexander C. Soper, “Two Stelae and a Pagoda on the Central Peak, Mt. Sung,” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 16 (1962): 41–48.

But the devils of the folk traditions, before the arrival of the Christian missionaries, had already been repeatedly subdued, first by Taoist priests, then by Buddhist. Sung-shan had always been a stronghold of religious Taoism and had become in the early T'ang a retreat for eminent Taoist masters of the so-called Mao-shan school. However, the Taoist attitude toward folk beliefs was different from that of Ch'an, despite a similar elitist contempt. The symbolic system of the folk traditions was accepted as such by Taoism but was hierarchized as an inferior level. Such is still the case today in Taiwan, where mediums and Taoist priests perform hierarchized rituals side by side. Buddhists, however, felt compelled to convert or subdue the local deities, to erase the memory of the places, to reconvert or desacralize spaces, to decode and reencode legends. The following stories bear witness to this process.

The "founders" of the Northern school, Shen-hsiu (606–706) and his disciples, have been criticized by their rivals as advocating a form of Ch'an that was too intellectual, influenced as it was by the Hua-yen philosophy of "copenetration of phenomena." But there was another side of their personality, stressed largely outside of the Ch'an tradition, that helps to explain their popular appeal: they were renowned for their supranormal powers (*abhijñā*), their capacity to predict the future or to subdue the invisible world. Subduing snakes or wild animals was a classical example of *abhijñā*. Before moving to the capital and to nearby Sung-shan, Shen-hsiu had spent several years of ascetic practice on another mountain, Yü-ch'üan shan. Popular tradition has kept the following account of his settlement there: "When Shen-shiu arrived near Yü-ch'üan shan, a huge snake came from the ground. Shen-hsiu remained seated without fear, and the next day he found a treasure hidden at the foot of a tree; with this treasure, he was able to build a temple."⁷

The snake is here presented as a potentially harmful, but eventually benevolent, messenger of the invisible world. The spiritual power acquired through meditation allows Shen-hsiu to vanquish fear and gain acknowledgment from the local god. In most other cases, the venom of the snake is transmuted into a gift of water, the discovery of a source that allows the construction of a temple.⁸

⁷ Shen-hsien t'ung-chien 14, quoted by Henri Doré, *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine*, 2d pt. (Shanghai, 1916): 7:205.

⁸ One is here reminded of the ambiguous etymology, pointed out by Mauss, of the German term *Gift*, meaning both "gift" and "poison." See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967), p. 62.

In another instance, the snake appears as a malevolent spirit that must be pacified in order for an existing community to remain alive. The story takes place on Sung-shan, in the community of the Northern Ch'an master P'u-chi. P'u-chi had one day scorned a monk who failed to take proper care of his begging bowl with the words: "This bowl is your life." Some time later, this bowl was broken by someone else, and the monk, mad with anger or having taken literally his master's words, died. The following night, P'u-chi warned the monks to remain in their cells, as the monastery was about to receive a strange visit. In the middle of the night, a huge snake appeared, actually a reincarnation of the dead monk who had come for revenge. P'u-chi, apparently unmoved, appeased it with a sermon on the retribution of acts and foretold its rebirth as a human in a neighboring village.⁹

We find several structurally similar stories in which a Northern school adept confers the Bodhisattva precepts to the god of Sung-shan. Although the god is not represented here as (or by) a snake, these stories clearly belong to the same cycle of legends enacting the transmission of local jurisdiction from a local god to the Buddhist order. For example, one night Hui-an, a codisciple of Shen-hsiu, said to his disciples: "Let each of you stay inside and close the doors. At the third watch, a spirit will come.' Soon, the sound of a large escort was heard. Wind and rain arrived together. The spirit circled several times around the courtyard. After Hui-an had talked with it, giving it repeated injunctions, it bowed twice and departed. When asked the reason for all this, Hui-an replied: 'I just conferred the Bodhisattva precepts to the spirit of Sung-shan.'"¹⁰

In all these cases, the disruptive power of a *local* spirit is pacified by the Buddhist teaching, that is, by the revelation of a higher understanding of reality, one that implies an overall, *unlocalized* vision. This supposedly unlocalized allocution allows in turn the allocation by the god of a territorial concession to the Buddhist order and the subsequent *foundation* of a temple, or its reestablishment.

⁹ See *Shen-seng chuan* 7, in Takakusu Junjirō, ed., *Taishō shinshu daizōkyō* (hereafter *T.*, followed by volume number, catalog number, page, and column) (Tokyo, 1924–32), *T.*, 50, 2064:991a. A slightly different account is given by Henri Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. M. Kennely, S.J. (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1966), 8:526–29.

¹⁰ See *Sung kao-seng chuan* (hereafter *SKSC*) 19, in *T.*, 50, 2061:823b–c. A similar meeting takes place between Yüan-kuei, a disciple of Hui-an, and the tutelary god of Sung-shan. The story is somewhat more elaborate and tells the dialogue between the Ch'an monk and the god. See *SKSC* 19, pp. 828c–29a. The story is translated by Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, 8:490–92.

Sometimes, if not always, the disruptive act comes from the Ch'an monk, rather than from the local spirit. A case in point is that of P'o-tsao To, or "To the stove breaker," a disciple of Hui-an. His nickname derives from the following story. There was on Sung-shan a shamaness who could sacrifice to the stove god and perform exorcisms. One day To visited her. He spoke at first to her, then he struck the stove, saying: "Whence comes the deity? Where are the miraculous spirits?" And he completely demolished it. Everybody was startled and terrified.¹¹ Then a layman in a plain blue robe appeared and bowed respectfully to To, saying: "I have suffered many afflictions here. Now by virtue of your discoursing on the doctrine of *non-birth*, I have been reborn into the heavens. I cannot repay your kindness." Having said this, he departed.¹²

FROM PLACE TO SPACE

What do these stories tell us? I think they reveal, among other things, the opposition between two types of vision of space, hence two different anthropologies, that of Ch'an and that of territorial cults symbolized by the snake, the mountain god, or other local spirits. The ambiguous nature of these beings has often been noticed. I would like to stress their subversive power vis-à-vis the elaborate discourse of established religious traditions and the territorial claim of snake symbolism. After all, did not the snake succeed in expropriating Adam and Even from the garden of Eden? In other words, my purpose is not to attempt a structural analysis of these stories but, rather, what we may call a *topo-analysis*, to use in a somewhat different sense a term coined by Gaston Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space*. Henri Doré mentions somewhere that Shu-wang, the "god of sodomy," was master of the king of snakes. I would like to mention, as a kind of counterpoint, a beautiful story written in a radically different context by the Egyptian woman writer Alifa Rifaat, entitled "My World of the Unknown."¹³ The heroine of this story has a

¹¹ In the SKSC variant, the stove falls apart by itself and "not by human power." See T., 50, 2061:828b.

¹² I have summarized several variants of the story. The SKSC version, as noted above, downplays P'o-tsao To's iconoclasm. The story was also known in medieval Japan but was interpreted as a rehabilitation of popular religion. See also Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, 8:548; and Robert E. Morrell, *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū Ichien, a Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 93–94.

¹³ Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965); Doré, *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine*, 11:1044; Alifa Rifaat, *Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories* (London, Melbourne, and New York: Quartet Books, 1983), pp. 61–76.

wonder-full love affair with a snake, who initiates her to the forbidden pleasures and to the mysteries of the invisible world. The lesbian overtones of the novel (the snake is referred to sometimes as “he,” sometimes as “she”) caused it to be censored in Egypt and to appear first in English translation. At any rate, I feel it illustrates nicely how the snake and its symbolism may subvert the dominant, male, and rational discourse.

In the process of its official recognition, Ch'an came to hold precisely this type of discourse. Despite its popularization, it always remained a nominalist and elitist teaching. Its subduing and displacing of various symbols of territorial power is highly significant. At first glance, the contrast or conflict between the various symbolic systems labelled as Ch'an and popular religion (and the mediating case of Taoism) seems to *express* itself in the opposition between different conceptions of space. But referring to an *expression* would imply that such conceptions are derived, ancillary to the doctrines. On the contrary, I want to stress the “primacy of perception,” to use Merleau-Ponty's expression. There is no need of a Copernican revolution to realize that religious or sectarian polarization may result from a basic epistemological divergence concerning space and, more precisely, sacred space. In P. Bourdieu's words, “The vision of the world is a di-vision of the world.”¹⁴ This perceptive difference is itself grounded in specific bodily postures and determines, in turn, religious practice. It may, for example, be traced back to the contrast between the crucial role of sitting in Ch'an practice and that of walking in popular rituals or pilgrimages.¹⁵ Whatever the case, this relative “primacy of perception” and the subsequent divergence of perceptions explain why I would prefer to speak of “epistemological dualism” instead of the “doctrinal” or “ritual” dualism described by some historians of Chinese religion.¹⁶ Not only within the same society do we find different temporal or spatial strata but also in the same specific

¹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964); Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), p. 348.

¹⁵ A Japanese informant who happens to be both a Shugendō practitioner and a fervent Christian pointed out that paradoxically, at least from his experience, while the mind in *zazen* wanders freely, the consciousness of the pilgrim is fixed on a spot in front of his feet and remains motionless while the environment changes. But I suspect that the modality of the pilgrim's process, the itinerary itself with its particularities, shapes significantly the consciousness of the less contemplative or introverted pilgrims (who often travel by bus, anyway).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 46, and “Dualism and Conflict in Chinese Popular Religion,” in *Transitions and Transformations in the History of Religions*, ed. Frank Reynolds and Theodore M. Ludwig (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), pp. 153–84.

geographical area and within the same religious tradition or even the same person.

I believe that we witness with the emergence of Ch'an a new form of space (and of time—but we will leave the question of temporality aside),¹⁷ “whose homogeneity abolishes the old heterogeneities of various forms of sacred space.”¹⁸ A mountain such as Sung-shan was an essential part of the cosmological system inherited from the Han. This system, described in a magisterial manner by Marcel Granet,¹⁹ was an intellectual construct. In actual practice, Chinese cosmology was probably a spatially and temporally discontinuous whole, whose cohesion has been somewhat exaggerated by traditional Sinology.²⁰ At any rate, it was later reinterpreted, adapted, and subverted by the popular tradition and by religious Taoism. However, its fundamental intuition was never questioned—namely, that space is complex and unstable, that it is not always or everywhere the same; now diluted, now concentrated, it constitutes a “hierarchized federation of heterogeneous expanses.”²¹ Even after the cosmological structure itself had collapsed, the perception of a “qualitative,” heterogeneous space remained prevalent. This intuition is not specifically Chinese. Even today, as Lévi-Strauss points out, “however rebellious our Euclidian mind may have become to the qualitative conception of space, it does not depend on us that great astronomical and meteorological phenomena affect regions with an imperceptible but indelible coefficient.”²²

¹⁷ Although it may be argued that the dichotomy between the visual metaphors of Ch'an and of popular religion is in fact the projection onto the plane of the dominant discourse of Ch'an of a more fundamental dichotomy between visual and auditory metaphors. David Chidester has shown how visual imagery is associated with continuity, spatial simultaneity, and presentational disclosure of information, while auditory imagery refers to discontinuity, temporal sequence, and referential disclosure of information. All these epistemological dichotomies underlie the opposition between Ch'an and popular religion. For further details, see David Chidester, “Word against Light: Perception and the Conflict of Symbols,” *Journal of Religion* 65, no. 1 (January 1985): 46–62. Or again, in Foucault's words, “One could perhaps say that certain ideological conflicts . . . oppose the pious descendants of time and the determined inhabitants of space” (Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 [Spring 1986]: 22). In this light it is significant that visual metaphors (such as, precisely, “light”) still inform our discourse in Ch'an tradition. This fact may be compensated for by our attempt to stress the *discontinuity* (and therefore the popular elements) of this tradition, rather than its synchronic or diachronic continuity.

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, “The Realist Floor-Plan,” in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 374.

¹⁹ See Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1968), pp. 75–318.

²⁰ For a criticism of the Durkheimian influence on Granet and French sinology from the point of view of “practical logic,” see Pierre Bourdieu (n. 14 above), and *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

²¹ Granet, p. 84.

²² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), p. 136.

The fragments of the old Chinese cosmology were loosely incorporated as raw materials and actualized in new symbolic systems, whose logic was a rather different one, more akin to the "practical logic" defined by Bourdieu, a type of logic that "constantly sacrifices the care for coherence to the search for efficacy."²³ This is why a structural analysis would prove here reductionistic in its very systematicity.

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW VISION

In the same way that Ch'an hagiography was a composition of places that ultimately defined an empty or different spiritual space,²⁴ the construction of monasteries created a new domain, a *u-topian* space that was a nonspace or *non-lieu*. A center, and yet decentering or displacing the old spatial frame; a concrete space, and yet functioning as a kind of negative field, ruled as it was by the law of emptiness. It belonged to another order and was a negation of the dense and pluralistic space that characterizes popular religion. Such is the result of "this perfidious dose of homogeneity that allows comparison, and therefore the creation of a hierarchy."²⁵ As Fredric Jameson suggests, "this abstract structure of temporality [and of spatiality] clearly cannot emerge until the older traditional activities, projects, rituals through which [space] was experienced . . . have broken down."²⁶

This epistemological shift is expressed not only in hagiographical discourse but also more directly in doctrinal terms. P'o-tsao To converts the mountain god by preaching to him the truth of the "unborn," the "sudden teaching" superior to all gradual *upāya* or "skillful means," the ultimate truth that subsumes and cancels all relative truths. The symbolic violence of this "sudden teaching" is revealed by the physical violence of his smashing the stove (this crude fact is euphemized in a later variant). "Nonbirth" (*wu-sheng*, Sanskrit *anutpāna*) is the equivalent for the Mahāyāna cardinal tenet of Emptiness (*śūnyatā*): because everything is empty, it is called "unborn." Thus space is emptied of everything, and all phenomena are deprived of any ontological status. To paraphrase Horkheimer and Adorno, from Buddha to P'o-tsao To (in the original: "from Parmenides to Russell"), "the motto remains: unity. What is constantly exacted is the destruction of all gods and qualities. . . . The mind that practiced magic was not one and identical. The multiplicity of qualities

²³ Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, p. 426.

²⁴ See Michel de Certeau, "Hagiographie," in *Encyclopedia Universalis* (Paris, 1968), 8:207-9.

²⁵ Lévi-Strauss, p. 170.

²⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 261.

succumbs to the identity of mind and its correlate, the identity of nature."²⁷ The essentially pluralistic nature of popular religion is negated, replaced by an abstract vision. According to Michel Serres,

To be pluralistic means that truths are always local, distributed in a somewhat complicated way in space. In other words, there are *always* singularities. The opposite of pluralism is to say that a single truth obtains for the entire space. . . . There is a difference between a homogeneous space, entirely occupied by a single truth, and a complex space where the whole task consists in passing from one singularity to another. . . . On the other hand, to have everything all at once, to occupy the whole space abruptly, . . . this is what these ideologies do. After all, what does it mean, a universal space: a specialist tries to occupy the whole field. It is an imperialism.²⁸

Such was precisely the strategy of the all-at-once or sudden doctrine advocated by early Ch'an. By the same token, "the joy of alternations and reincarnations, the joyful relativity, the joyful negation of identity and of single meaning, the negation of the stupid coincidence with oneself,"²⁹ which, according to Bakhtin, characterize popular culture, all disappear. That this Mahāyāna (and Ch'an) bird's-eye vision emanates from an intellectual elite and meets the ideological needs of the higher strata of society is obvious.³⁰ For Ch'an masters, as for Hegel, "in order to know facts well and to see them at their true place, one must be placed at the summit—and not look at them through the key-hole of morality or of some other wisdom."³¹ Typical, in this respect, is the metaphor used by the fifth Ch'an patriarch Hung-jen to describe his contemplative practice: "When sitting in meditation, you feel like being at the top of a solitary tall mountain, and gazing off into the distance on all four sides—it is limitless. Loosen your body and mind to fill up the whole world and abide in the Buddha realm. The pure Dharmakāya is limitless." The empty inner space discovered by Hung-jen's contemplation is strikingly different from the densely populated realm of the Taoist body, considered

²⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *La dialectique de la raison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 25–27.

²⁸ Michel Serres, interview for *Le Monde* (May 10, 1981), reprinted in *Entretiens avec Le Monde*, vol. 1, *Philosophies* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984), pp. 198–99.

²⁹ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *L'oeuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen-âge et sous la Renaissance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 49.

³⁰ In his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 28, Yi-fu Tuan points out that "we more readily assume a God-like position, looking at the earth from above, than from the perspective of another mortal living on the same level as ourselves."

³¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *La raison dans l'histoire* (Paris: Plon, 1965), p. 28.

as a sacred space where myriads of gods dwell and must be localized, fixed by inner contemplation. These two types of inner contemplation generate two bodies, the transparent and disparaged body of the Ch'an tradition and the opaque, mysterious, and sacralized body of the popular and Taoist religions.³²

The Dharmakāya, or Cosmic Body of the Buddha, is a metaphor for empty, infinite space coextensive with the Buddha Dharma. It is often mentioned in Ch'an dialogues such as the following one where a monk, scolded by another for sitting with his back to the altar, silences him by asking: "Since the Dharmakāya fills the entire space, why should one sit facing in one direction rather than another?"³³ The next dialogue seems like a parodic footnote to the same story: "A monk said to another: 'Since the Dharmakāya fills all space, where in the entire universe can I find a place to shit?'"³⁴

Ch'an masters, prefiguring structuralism, were in fact saying: "Remove everything, so I can see." The apocryphal poem attributed to the sixth patriarch stresses that "fundamentally, there is not a single thing to see." A disciple of Shen-hsiu, Chih-ta, describes in a doctrinal tract the method by which to "gaze at the mind" or "at the unlocalized." "All obstacles and errors are created by mind. To gaze at the mind is to gaze at the unlocalized. The unlocalized is your mind. Space empty of all entities is called 'receptacle,' and in it are the vital principle and consciousness." "Unlocalized means the absence of any mind (or dharma). This unlocalized is the awakening of the Buddha, the basis of the practice of all Bodhisattvas. By gazing at it you will come to see."³⁵

³² Hung-jen, *Leng-ch'ieh Shih-tzu Chih*, T., 85, 2837:1289c. Concerning the Taoist body and inner contemplation, see Kristofer Schipper, *Le corps taoïste: Corps physique—corps social* (Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1979); and Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), pp. 279–86 and 346–73.

³³ See *Ch'uan-teng lu* 27, in T. (n. 9 above), 51, 2076:435b.

³⁴ See *Ch'an-lin seng-pao chuan*, in *Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō* (Taipei: Hsin-wen feng, 1968–70), 137:71. This reminds me of the famous anecdote in the Chinese novel translated by Anthony Yu, *The Journey to the West*, where the hero, an unruly monkey, challenged by the Buddha to show his supranormal powers, leaps to the end of the universe, urinates on five huge pillars he finds there, and returns only to realize that these were the fingers of the cosmic Buddha, whose palm he never actually left. Here, of course, the Buddhist conception of space, though significantly modified at one level by the process of the pilgrims, is never actually threatened by the rebellious attempts of popular tradition symbolized by the monkey. See Anthony C. Yu, *The Journey to the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 1:172–74.

³⁵ Concerning the apocryphal poem, cf. Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 132. See my article, "Le maître de dhyāna Chih-ta et le 'subitisme' de l'école du Nord," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 2 (1986): 123–32.

Such seeing is defined as nonseeing, nonthinking, nonattachment to any phenomenon. Chih-ta denounces as illusions all kinds of supernatural visions or powers induced by meditation.

The importance of noncognitive perception is stressed repeatedly in early Ch'an texts. So is the denunciation of supernatural powers such as predicting the future or reading the thoughts of others. Such demonstrations are rejected as the products of "demoniac *dhyāna*," although, as we have seen, they accounted for the popular appeal of these same Ch'an masters. However, what seems ultimately to command the Ch'an attitude is the visual and spatial metaphor. Space is perceived as empty, all phenomena are compared to illusions, flowers in the sky (visions induced by hallucinogens). Popular religion seems to be perceived here, in the literal sense, as the opium of the people. The following anecdotes, staging P'u-chi, will illustrate how Northern Ch'an attempted to move beyond the imaginary and symbolic system of the old tradition:

It is said that when I-kung met P'u-chi for the first time, the latter told him to sit. After a while, P'u-chi asked: "Look at my mind. Where is it?" I-kung answered: "The master, riding a horse, has just passed the monastery gate." When asked again, I-kung said: "Watch out! Why do you, master, stand at the top of the pagoda?" P'u-chi said: "You are keen. Yes, indeed, you were right. But try to take another look at me!" After a while, sweat began to form beads on I-kung's forehead, his face turned crimson, he politely bowed as if to take leave, and said: "Master, haven't you entered the realm of Samantabhadra?"

According to another story, Liu Chung-yung, an expert on the *I-ching* (*Book of Changes*), one day consulted master P'u-chi, who asked him:

"Won't you try to divine where my mind is?" Liu said: "Your mind is on the seventh inscription of the roof's eaves." When asked again, he answered that [P'u-chi's mind] was here or there. P'u-chi told him: "The ten thousand things cannot avoid the numbers [governing fate]. Let me try to avoid them. Try to fathom me!" After a while, Liu was taken aback. "It is the end. Your mind is completely immobile, I cannot know it anymore."³⁶

The two stories have their prototype in the Taoist philosopher Chuang-tzu, and several variants appear in the biographies of early Ch'an masters. The point is that, through nonthinking, Ch'an practitioners enter into the realm of emptiness, a mental space where no

³⁶ See Tuan Ch'eng-shih, *Yu-yang tsa-tsu*, ed. Imamura Yoshio (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1980), 4 (Tokyo bunko 401): 32, 972.

image, no symbol, remains, where no cosmology or causality (whether that of the *I-ching* or of Buddhism) avails.³⁷ At any rate, the tabula rasa created by P'u-chi's nonthinking is the spiritual equivalent of P'o-tsau To's iconoclasm. The flow of Ch'an discourse covers all the accidents of the popular landscape, creating a clean, abstract space that can be embraced at one glance. The world is seen as a limpid, homogeneous, harmonious whole. The old boundaries have been erased, and boundless space means boundless sovereignty. As one ninth-century Ch'an master, Hsüan-sha Shih-pei, expressed it, "The entire universe is one bright pearl. What is there to interpret or to understand?" And the Japanese monk Dōgen (1200–1253), who quotes this, concludes: "Thus, even coming and going in the Black Mountain's Cave of Demons is nothing but the one bright pearl."³⁸ The paradigm shift implies a departure from hermeneutics: the world, emptied of symbols, does not need to be interpreted any more. Truth reveals itself im-mediately to an un-mediated vision.

The opaque, ambivalent, at times dangerous world of folk religion has been dispelled by the clear, haughty vision of the enlightened mind. Ch'an Enlightenment, before being supreme awakening, is an almost Voltairian perception of reality, a kind of *Aufklärung* that dismisses an entire patch of religious experience. But, as Adorno and Horkheimer noticed, "In the same way as myth already accomplished the *Aufklärung*, the latter already becomes entangled in mythology." Furthermore, the epistemological space of Ch'an, despite its homogeneity, is not the amorphous profane space described by Mircea Eliade.³⁹ It is, at least theoretically, yet another type of sacred space. Buddhist emptiness remains a structure and as such needs to be objectified.

CH'AN IN-SIGHTS AND DI-VISIONS

The imposition of the Ch'an worldview on popular beliefs, however liberating some of its effects may have been for a selected few, was not a complete or enduring success. The ideological tide of Ch'an eventually had to recede, letting some islands of the popular episteme

³⁷ It is interesting to note that one of P'u-chi's disciples, I-hsing (673–727), became one of the foremost Chinese experts in numbers and symbols and elaborated a new calendar. His name has been recorded in the history of science and appears among those of Copernicus, Newton, and others on the frontispiece of the Ste. Genevieve Library in Paris. Nearing a premature death, he went back to Sung-shan to see his old master P'u-chi, who, of course, had already foretold his sudden visit. See SKSC 9 (n. 10 above), in *T.*, 50, 2061:760c.

³⁸ See *Shōbōgenzō*, in *T.*, 82, 2582:25c.

³⁹ See Mircea Eliade, *Le sacré et le profane* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 21–24.

reemerge in the midst of its discourse. The ambiguity of some of the anecdotes mentioned is significant. The first story about Shen-hsiu being acknowledged by the local god appearing under the guise of a huge snake was actually introducing another tale, which for obvious reasons does not seem to have been recorded within the Ch'an school itself: "The peasants of the place venerated Kuang-kung [a very popular god invoked against devils]. Shen-hsiu destroyed its pagoda. No sooner had the pagoda been destroyed than a black cloud covered the sky, and Kuang-kung appeared in it, riding his horse and holding his sword, to ask Shen-hsiu the reason for his behavior. Shen-hsiu had to rebuild the pagoda, and Kuang-kung ordered him to take up the duty of gate-keeper. . . . Since this event, the tradition has been to place Shen-hsiu as gate-keeper of pagodas."⁴⁰

Here clearly we are offered the other side of the picture, one that usually remains unseen. Popular tradition was not completely passive, and could often subvert authorized, clerical discourse. Unfortunately, only the latter usually reached historiographers, who have been consciously or unconsciously importing into their own discourse the biases inherited from the "great texts." Often the snake, and with it the local traditions, may have been the winner.⁴¹

This leads me to examine some of the ambiguities of the Northern Ch'an tradition, ambiguities that reflect its hybrid origin. It is significant that Shen-hsiu, the "founder" of this tradition, is consigned to the role of gatekeeper, that is, of local god, by a more powerful deity. The threshold, in many local traditions, is a dangerous place, a focal point where space inverts, and Turner, among others, has stressed that liminal states and individuals are both ambiguous and dangerous. Shen-hsiu is thus the medium, the focal point from which a different, inverted conception of space—and a new school—arise. He represents, like the threshold, a transition from one epistemological space to another. As a transitional figure, he will be rejected by the later Ch'an tradition, whose orthodoxy stems from this

⁴⁰ Doré, *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine* (n. 7 above), p. 205. Maspero (p. 151) seems to have misinterpreted the story.

⁴¹ As in the well-known Dōjōji legend, where a monk is pursued by the angry spirit of a woman and eventually calmed by the intense heat of the snake's passion under the bell of the Dōjōji temple where he had taken refuge. Unlike the Japanese character Tamino at the opening of the *Magic Flute*, he is not saved by the Queen of the Night nor by his fellow monks. Another interesting case shows the Buddhist recuperation of a tale in which ignorant Taoist aspirants to immortality are found to have fallen victims to a huge python. See Hisayuki Miyakawa, "Local Cults around Mount Lu at the Time of Sun En's Rebellion," in *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 96–98.

scapegoating process. But, as the mediating figure of the gatekeeper, he will contribute to the influence of Ch'an on popular religion.

We can see that these stories reflect two very different tendencies. On the one hand are attempts by an emerging "great tradition" to establish its superiority over the other great traditions as well as over folk traditions. On the other hand, some stories reflect the point of view of the folk traditions, with their subversion of authorized, clerical discourse. We seem to find ourselves here in what Maurice Freedman has called the "rather tired field of great and little traditions."⁴² Of course, the contrast must be nuanced. Within Ch'an itself, through its intercourse with local beliefs, we must distinguish between a more intellectual and a more popular stratum. Both poles of this intellectual spectrum are in fact to be found within the same individual, who is oscillating constantly between them. But the polarization itself remains a legitimate one and should not be blurred simply because it rarely corresponds to a clear-cut social division. We may agree with Victor Turner that "the division between 'great' and 'little' traditions or between such similar antitheses as popular/learned, folk/elite, low/high, parochial/universal, peasant/aristocratic, lay/hieratic, is of little importance for the founders of protest religious movements"—and Ch'an started as one of these. It is true that "great and little traditions were rejected alike as the 'establishment,' as structure, and what was stressed instead was religious experience."⁴³ But these movements themselves, as Turner elsewhere admits, soon became "great traditions" or "structures." And so did Ch'an. However, this does not mean that the distinction between the two types of vision collapses or that, as Freedman argues, "elite and peasant religion rest upon a common base, representing two versions of one religion that we may see as idiomatic translations of each other."⁴⁴ I tend rather to agree with Jakobson when he says: "Between any two neighboring cultural domains, there are always border areas. Which does not allow us to negate the existence of two distinct domains and the fecund character of their separation."⁴⁵ These domains do not necessarily overlap with existing social and political divisions. These two modes of thought, or ways of access to knowledge, are not separated by watertight bulkheads; they do not inhabit completely different types of minds. They rather reflect tensions and conflicts resulting from a subtle epistemological shift, a transformation that occurred within the minds of the

⁴² Maurice Freedman, in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur Wolf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 36.

⁴³ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 286.

⁴⁴ Freedman, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Roman Jakobson, *Questions de poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 72.

people without their necessarily being aware of it. In this respect, it is for heuristic purposes that we have been temporarily using the terms "great" and "little" traditions. The relation, tension, or conflict is prior to the terms it relates and defines; these terms therefore should not be reified, as Redfield or some of his disciples did. This relation is also asymmetrical: the so-called little tradition, in particular, remains elusive. Its nomadic logic is that of poaching; it follows its own hidden tracks in a field that is not within its jurisdiction. Actually, it does not have any jurisdiction over anything and is most of the time silenced.⁴⁶ Our topo-analysis turns into a "geography of the repressed." The "great versus little traditions" paradigm, as used here, does not then refer to a real opposition between two juridically or socially distinct parties but, rather, to different perceptions, different and unequal uses of the same space. The many criticisms of this and other similar paradigms as static categories or reified polarities remain perfectly valid, but they often have a cost. By merely rejecting these notions as obsolete, one runs the risk of missing the actual polarization that "takes place," the crucial split between different generative epistemological schemes. This confusion between the *noetic* process and the *noematic* product leads us to overlook the agonistic nature of any religious tradition in situ, the evasive dynamics of its spatial relations, or the complex dialectics of its local and imported components.⁴⁷

Within Ch'an itself, we find two components that should not simply be construed as two conflicting doctrines (as the so-called sudden/gradual controversy that took place in the eighth century, and its modern exponents, would lead us to believe) but, rather, as two incommensurable visions, two perceptions of space and time. Or, as Groethuysen said of Christianity, it is a matter of "two worlds whose inhabitants, while using the same terms, do not speak the same language."⁴⁸ "One might predict from first principles," Freedman suggests, that "a society [such as the Chinese one] so differentiated by social status and power would develop a religious system that allowed . . . religious similarity to be expressed as though it were religious difference."⁴⁹ I would argue that the reverse is equally true

⁴⁶ See Michel de Certeau, *The Invention of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), and *Heterologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ When considering the resulting, objectified traditions, one might distinguish, as does Dominick Lacapra, between "the hegemonic culture(s) of dominant classes, popular culture(s), and high culture(s)" (Lacapra, *History and Criticism* [Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1985], p. 58). However, there may be no such thing as "popular culture(s)," only a "popular" use of hegemonic and/or high cultures.

⁴⁸ Bernard Groethuysen, *Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), p. 20.

⁴⁹ Freedman, p. 38.

and that Chinese society did at times allow religious difference to be expressed as though it were religious similarity. Hence the fundamental ambiguity of Northern Ch'an or of similar transitional, hybrid, syncretistic movements. Despite its intellectual tendency, it still had to resort to popular beliefs to establish the legitimacy of its "philosophy," and its hagiographical literature often seemed to contradict its theoretical discourse. We are familiar with similar contradictions in the Western philosophical tradition. Despite Aristotle's comment that "those who [in philosophy] use myth are not worth being seriously considered,"⁵⁰ Descartes's tabula rasa led to problematic theological conclusions. And it is well known that Plato, while disdaining myth, spoke from within a space still defined by the discourse of mythology. Ch'an orthodoxy, once well established, will be able to censure more effectively popular beliefs. But Northern Ch'an masters, despite their "abstract" tendency, still had to rely on them to a certain extent.

An example of abstraction is the genealogical chart, which proved so important in the elaboration of the Ch'an patriarchal tradition. Pierre Bourdieu points out that "genealogies and other learned models are to the sense of social orientation what a map, abstract model of all possible itineraries, is to the practical sense of space."⁵¹ The analogy between the genealogy and the map or plan derives from the substitution, in both cases, of a regular, homogeneous space, whether social, historical, or geographical, for the discontinuous space of practical strategies, actualized according to time and context. But here is the paradox: in order to establish the legitimacy of their patriarchal lineage, Ch'an masters had to appeal to the representatives of popular tradition. Thus I-fu, having secretly inherited the Ch'an dharma from his master Shen-hsiu, would have been unable to prove his claim to patriarchal succession without the public acknowledgment received from Wan-hui, a monk who was famous for his supranormal powers and who remained independent of any established school. Wan-hui was regarded as an avatar of Kuan-yin and was later enshrined in the Chinese popular pantheon as a divine jester and a god of "union."⁵²

Another ambiguity or paradox is that, while Ch'an masters were intent on desacralizing places such as mountains and imposing on them the abstract space of their monasteries, they became engrossed

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* B.4.

⁵¹ See Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (n. 14 above), pp. 58 and 141. For a criticism of Bourdieu's notion of "practical mastery," see Alfred Gell, "How to Read a Map: Remarks on the Practical Logic of Navigation," *Man* 20, no. 3 (June 1985): 271-86.

⁵² See Kristofer Schipper, "The Divine Jester: Some Remarks on the Gods of the Chinese Marionette Theater," *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica* 21 (Spring 1966): 90-92.

in enshrining relics and erecting stupas in order to fix dangerous chthonian influences, thus creating new centers, new sacred spaces or places that were protected by local gods and were in due time identified with them. However, within the Ch'an school itself, mythology was replaced by hagiography, and the anchoring points of Ch'an faith were sought in the life and death of famous anchorites. Thus, Sung-shan's famous places became the cave where Bodhidharma practiced "mural contemplation," the place where the second Ch'an patriarch cut off his arm to show his religious zeal, or the stupas of Shen-hsiu and P'u-chi. It is ironical that the "mural contemplation" attributed to Bodhidharma and defined as "theoretical entrance" or contemplation of the Absolute was soon misinterpreted as a mere "contemplation of the wall"⁵³ and that this wall itself became a sacred place. Thus, in the process of relocating or resacralizing its space, Ch'an universalism has been gradually subverted by popular tradition and its "finite provinces of meaning."⁵⁴ The new cultural models it imposed, elaborated in the rarefied atmosphere of social and spiritual summits, lost some of their purity in the densely haunted valleys of the sacred mountains. However, the unmediated vision that generated the immediate or sudden teaching of Ch'an was never actually threatened from outside. Its reappropriation by the Ch'an tradition as a semiotic system allowed a return to the manifold space of symbols and hermeneutics. Contrary to popular religion that remained a *tekne hermeneutiké*, focusing on the interpretation of oracles and wonders, Ch'an seemed to refuse the mediation of the imaginary and the symbolical and to disparage interpretation. In theory Ch'an doctrine did reject the intermediary realm of popular religion, although it still advocated the unmediated coexistence of two antithetical discourses (ultimate and conventional truths), thus apparently justifying Hegel's understanding of Chinese thought as "maintaining the immediate and paralysing face-to-face of inside and outside, of the universal and a prosaic wisdom."⁵⁵ It may be true, as Merleau-Ponty noticed, that in this case "thinking shifts without benefit from abstraction to phenomena, and meanwhile does not become, does not ripen."⁵⁶ This refusal of mediation (and its extreme consequence, the collapsing of profane and sacred) constitutes probably the major problem of Ch'an

⁵³ On this question, see Bernard Faure, *Le Traité de Bodhidharma: Première anthologie du bouddhisme Chan* (Paris: Le Mail, 1986), pp. 23–32.

⁵⁴ I borrow this expression from Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers*, vol. 1, *The Problem of Social Reality* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962), p. 231.

⁵⁵ Hegel, quoted in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eloge de la philosophie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 193.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

doctrine. In actual practice, however, all kinds of mediations were established for the sake of common people.⁵⁷

Let me return to the theme with which I started, the snake—in a circular way that is itself symbolized by a snake biting its tail. It is significant that the figure supposed to have brought “pure” Zen to Japan and who developed a type of religious philosophy still highly valued today for its supposedly ecumenical nature, Dōgen, was saved on his way back to Japan by a dragon that took the shape of a small white snake that he put in his begging bowl.⁵⁸ The snake/dragon is here subdued or converted by the monk, but the monk owes him his life. In this respect, we may reconsider the words of P'u-chi to his careless disciple and realize that the begging bowl (and the snake hidden in it) is the very life of the monk. Each one is saved by the other, and it seems that Buddhists were well aware of this interdependence. Despite the inherent danger, it may be vital for any “great tradition,” whether Buddhist or Western thought, to “nurture a snake in its bosom.” It is therefore perhaps worth mentioning an illustration of a recent article on contemporary trends in French philosophy,⁵⁹ which has the serpent offering not the biblical fruit, or the legendary Chinese fountainhead, but, rather, a subversive instrument: the fountainpen. Does not that suggest that the subversive and vitalizing power of the snake, which we have seen at work in the Ch'an tradition, is still operating today, having replaced the uniformity of the structuralist era by “a mosaic of fragmentary and regional approaches” such as those of Michel Serres or Michel Foucault?⁶⁰

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⁵⁷ Ironically, the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, himself an expert in Christian “skillful means,” having once complained about the “idolatry” of Ch'an monks, was answered by one of them with the explanation that the “cult of idols” had been reluctantly established by the Sixth Patriarch, Shen-hsiu's successful rival, in order to meet the needs of the populace. Ricci took this as a pretext for breaking with the Buddhist clergy and for coming closer to the Confucian literati. See Louis J. Gallagher, S.J., trans., *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583–1610* (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 225.

⁵⁸ See Hubert Durt, “Daigenshuri,” in *Hōbōgirin: Dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1983), fasc. 6, p. 608.

⁵⁹ See Jean-Jacques Wunenberger, “La tentation philosophique,” *Magazine littéraire* 225 (December 1985): 18–20.

⁶⁰ In her book *Les mots, la mort, les sorts* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), translated into English under the title *Deadly Words*, p. 26, Jeanne Favret-Saada seems, however, to contrast her “localized” approach (and that of the folk practices characterized as witchcraft) with the “unlocalized” (utopian) discourse of both structuralists and post-structuralists.